



# CHIEF's Sight Picture

4 Aug 2003

## Testing a New Utility Uniform

By now most airmen have probably heard that we are going to wear test a new utility uniform, and you may be wondering why. Our intent is to create a uniform that will be distinctive, practical, easy to maintain, comfortable, and most important, a uniform you will be proud to wear. The wear test program will be conducted over the course of six months and will test 300 uniforms at nine bases representative of all our MAJCOMs and operating environments.

Our current utility uniform has been adequate, but now is the time to develop a uniform that better satisfies our needs as a service. In designing this test uniform, we considered the requirements for camouflage, how and where the uniform is used and who uses it. Our current utility uniform dates back to the late 1980s, and much has changed since then. We have become a more expeditionary force, with less time at home to spend caring for the uniform. In the last twenty years, material technology has improved greatly. As a result, we have designed one uniform that can satisfy our various climates and utility needs while eliminating the need for professional ironing to provide a polished appearance. Just as the other services have designed uniforms to meet their specific missions, we need to ensure our airmen have a uniform that fulfills our unique air and space missions. Another important change is the greater percentage of women in the force. In the late 1980s when we first adopted the current utility uniform, women comprised less than 13 percent of the total force -- today they are nearly 20 percent of the force. Since then, women have been required to wear uniforms designed to fit men. The test uniform will come in a full range of women's sizes, so women will be able to find a uniform that fits well. A uniform designed with the Air Force of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in mind will address these issues.

The care and upkeep of the current uniform requires professional laundry service or a lot of dedicated time with an iron to make it look neat. This can cost as much as six dollars each time the uniform is professionally cleaned. The test uniform will be easier to maintain and will not require professional laundering, ironing and starching. We estimate that home laundering will potentially save between \$180 and \$240 in laundry costs over the course of a year.

There are a number of other advantages to the uniform we have designed. The test uniform will employ the same fabric identified by our Marine colleagues as the optimum material for both durability and wash and wear characteristics. The test uniform pattern corresponds to the jobs our airmen do in most situations requiring a utility uniform, whereas the woodland camouflage pattern is suitable in only a limited number of environments. The pattern will recall the "tiger stripe" camouflage used during the Vietnam War, but with the distinctive Air Force embedded logo and a color scheme of

blue, gray and green that preliminary testing indicates may provide better camouflage. We're also making a number of changes based on inputs to the uniform board. We have located pockets where they will be most useful. We are also considering maintenance-free boots and alternative t-shirts that allow airmen to remove their utility shirts in hot climates without being out of uniform.

I ask that you take an objective look at the new uniform. It will be a distinctive Air Force uniform designed to fit well, look sharp and require much less maintenance than the current uniform. I think it will be a uniform you will feel proud and comfortable wearing. We will conduct the wear test throughout the Air Force starting in January 2004, and we'll solicit your feedback. My goal is to provide you a uniform that will satisfy your needs, while ensuring that we maintain the professional warrior image of the world's greatest Air Force.



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